

Dr. Felix Leopold Oswald

ONE OF THE SHINING LIGHTS IN THE FREE-THOUGHT WORLD.

In each decade Nature endows a few men for special work in the promulgation of truth. But few of these undertake to utilize these endowments in the proper direction. In the dark vault of night there are myriads of stars, but here and there we see one that shines brighter than the rest. So it is with humanity. Here and there, amid the flotsam and jetsam of life, one mind will predominate and stand above the rest. Especially may this be said of the subject of this brief sketch, for there were few like him, possessing his remarkable qualifications, and courageous enough to put them to a proper use.

Dr. Felix Leopold Oswald was born in Belgium, August, 1845. His parents were in a position of moderate comfort and ease, and gave the boy a good education, finally sending him to a medical college to fit him for the practice of medicine. His studies in anatomy, physiology, in hygiene and other co-ordinate branches of natural science, together with the pharmacopia, turned his mind in another trend, and instead of becoming an eminent physician, as it had been intended for him, he plunged into a deeper and more intricate study of natural history, a subject that held him in a spell of fascination. To aid him in the prosecution of his studies he undertook an extensive travel, penetrating many different countries, finally coming to America, where after a year or two in New York City, he turned westward and settled down in Hamilton, Ohio, later taking up a residence in Indiana.

He first came into prominent public notice by his scientific contributions to the *Popular Science Monthly*, and in a comparatively short space of time he began writing for the *American Freethought press*. His literary productions found their way into the magazines and papers of Germany and England, and in the course of time he became a prolific writer. Among the books he had written and published were "*Summerland Sketches: Rambles in the Backwoods of Mexico and Central America.*" This

was followed by "*Physical Education*," a work addressed to the average reader, as well as the profession. Then came "*The Secret of the East*," which was written in an argumentative frame, designed to show that the religion of Christendom emanated from Buddhism and the Oriental religions of the East. The "*Bible of Nature*" came next, and this may be said to have been his best and greatest work. In it he advocated the pure and unsullied principles of modern Secularism, and is among the most valuable contributions to Freethought literature of the 19th century. There was now a continual demand for his literary efforts. The large daily papers had frequent contributions from his pen and brain, and he invariably wrote in an anti-orthodox strain, thereby preaching Freethought as best he could, and the strangest part of this is the fact that these daily papers, notably the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, featured his writings on special pages and accorded them positions of great prominence.

Felix Oswald, as he was more popularly known, was a great, clear, and vigorous writer. He was no speaker, and for this reason he never appeared on the public platform. In all he wrote there was pure nature and naturalism. There was never a trace of the supernatural or mystical. He avoided paradoxes. He was the fortunate possessor of a keen insight into history and could present a fact in clear, bold and intelligent characters. Few men have done more for Freedom of Thought than Felix Oswald, and it is a pity that he could not have been spared for many years to come that he might have done even better and greater things for which his brilliant mind was so eminently fitted.

Only a few years ago, while journeying on a railroad train, Felix Oswald met his death. Incorrect signals, a mistake, a crash, fire broke out upon the shattered wreck, and among the ruins the body of Felix Oswald was found. Strange that he should come to such an end, but he had no opportunity, no chance to avoid it. He was among the dead, and when his name appeared in the published lists, the *American Freethought world* knew that it had lost one of its greatest advocates.